



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2007
WWW.USDOJ.GOV

CRM
(202) 514-2008
TDD (202) 514-1888

HIGH-RANKING MEMBER OF COLOMBIAN FARC NARCO-TERRORIST ORGANIZATION CONVICTED ON U.S. DRUG CHARGES

WASHINGTON – A high-ranking member of the designated foreign terrorist organization Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) has been convicted in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia on drug charges, Deputy Attorney General Paul J. McNulty announced today.

The jury in Washington, D.C., deliberated four days before returning the guilty verdicts earlier today. Nayibe Rojas Valderama, a/k/a “Sonia,” was convicted, along with co-defendants Jose Antonio Celis, a/k/a “Calvo,” and Juan Diego Giraldo, a/k/a “Flaco,” of narcotics trafficking. They had been indicted for conspiring to import five kilograms or more of cocaine into the United States and conspiring to manufacture and distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine intending and knowing that the cocaine would be unlawfully imported into the United States. The U.S. government is seeking the forfeiture of all assets derived from the alleged violations.

Rojas Valderama was the finance officer of the 14th Front of the FARC, and is the highest-ranking FARC member to be convicted in the United States. She was extradited from Colombia to the United States in March 2005 to stand trial on the U.S. charges. At sentencing, the defendants face a mandatory minimum of ten years in prison or a term of years as determined by the court. Sentencing is scheduled for May 7, 2007 at 9:30 a.m.

“Today's convictions represent a significant victory against the FARC, one of the most dangerous narco-terrorist organizations operating in Colombia. The convictions were made possible by extraordinary cooperation from the Colombian government, our valued partner in the fight to eradicate narcotics trafficking,” said Deputy Attorney General McNulty. “This case sends a message to major overseas drug trafficking organizations: We will investigate, prosecute, and punish all those who manufacture and distribute illegal drugs for export to the United States. There is no international safe haven for illegal narcotics traffickers.”

“The FARC is a double evil – they poison the blood of our people with their drugs and spill the blood of their own with guns and machetes bought with drug profits,” said Administrator Karen Tandy of the Drug Enforcement Administration. “As a financial officer for the guerilla group, Sonia Valderama was directly responsible for converting drug money to blood money – that is, overseeing the conversion of millions of dollars of cocaine profits from

cash to weapons, uniforms and ammunition to arm the most violent terrorists in this hemisphere.”

The evidence produced at trial consisted of the testimony of DEA agents, Colombian law enforcement officials and cooperating witnesses, as well as surveillance evidence of videotapes and tape-recorded conversations. The evidence showed that Rojas Valderama oversaw all aspects of the purchasing and production of cocaine in the 14th Front territory, and collected all of the proceeds from the sale of cocaine for the 14th Front. Jose Antonio Celis was a major drug trafficker who arranged for the purchase of large quantities of cocaine from Rojas Valderama and the 14th Front, and coordinated the transshipment of the cocaine from Colombia to Panama, and from Panama into the United States. Antonio Celis conspired with Rojas Valderama and Juan Diego Giraldo to purchase more than 5,000 kilograms of cocaine for shipment to the United States. Diego Giraldo introduced Celis to the 14th Front for the purpose of purchasing cocaine, worked with Rojas Valderama to purchase and transport cocaine, brought equipment for the 14th Front’s cocaine production operation, and assisted Rojas Valderama in all aspects of cocaine production and sale.

The FARC, a violent narco-terrorist guerrilla group operating in Colombia, controls large portions of Colombia and finances its violent conflict with the Colombian government by engaging in drug trafficking, augmented by other means including kidnapping and extortion. Drug trafficking is the lifeblood of the FARC because it enables the FARC to acquire weapons, ammunition and equipment necessary to carry on its violent attacks. DEA estimates that the FARC controls approximately 70 percent of the Colombian cocaine trade, and approximately 80 to 90 percent of the cocaine shipped to the United States comes from Colombia. The FARC produces and distributes thousands of kilograms per month for export to the United States and other countries.

A number of FARC members and criminal associates have been charged with terrorism and drug-related crimes in U.S. indictments. In addition to narcotics trafficking and other crimes, the indictments charge the FARC and its members with the kidnapping and murder of U.S. citizens.

The case was prosecuted in the District of Columbia by trial attorneys Ron McNeil, Stephen May and James Faulkner from the Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section of the Criminal Division. The investigation in this case was led by the Drug Enforcement Administration, in close cooperation with Colombian law enforcement.

#

07-094